

"John Haberle: Master of Illusion" is the fourth in a series of exhibitions devoted to "American Masters" to be presented at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Fairfield County. The exhibition was organized by Gertrude Grace Sill, guest curator, for the Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts. After its presentation at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Fairfield County, the exhibition will travel to the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

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The Changes of Time, 1888

Oil on canvas, 23¾ x 15¾ inches

Collection of Richard Manoogian

JOHN HABERLE: MASTER OF ILLUSION

Trompe l'oeil still-life paintings—works that intend to “fool the eye” with their illusion of reality—became popular in America after the Civil War. John Haberle (1856–1933) stands out as one of the most accomplished painters in this specialized genre.

Haberle was born in New Haven. After serving as an apprentice to a lithographic and engraving firm there, in 1884 he enrolled at the National Academy of Design in New York, where he received his only formal art training. The following year he returned to New Haven, established his own studio, and continued to teach at the New Haven Sketch Club, of which he was a founding member.

From the very beginning of his career, Haberle showed an interest in *trompe l'oeil* illusionism. *That's Me!*, his self-portrait of 1882, is a painting of a drawing on brown paper; one corner of the “drawing” curls forward to reveal Haberle's business card.

Like other *trompe l'oeil* painters of his time, Haberle depicted paper money, stamps, peanuts, smoking materials, musical instruments, and bric-a-brac. But unlike his most important contemporaries—William Harnett (1848–1892) and John Peto (1854–1907)—Haberle preferred to paint two-dimensional items, such as stamps, photographs, and newspaper clippings, partly because the illusion of reality could be more convincing with flat objects. The fanatical exactitude of Haberle's paintings also stands apart from the work of Harnett and Peto. Perhaps owing to his early career as a lithographer, Haberle painted very fine detail with extreme precision, and his paint surfaces are as smooth as glass, with no traces of brushwork.

Despite their apparent detachment, Haberle's paintings are highly subjective, replete with subtle layers of meaning and humorous visual and verbal puns. In *The Changes of Time* (cover), for example, he transformed the traditional *trompe l'oeil* currency picture, with its basic theme of counterfeiting, into a history painting and autobiographical statement. The changing currencies of an emerging America record this country's development from crown colony to independent nation, as does the painted frame with all the presidents. Haberle humorously asserts his own place in history by painting in his photograph at the lower right, along with a self-addressed envelope. This photograph and the girlie photograph at the upper left complete the irreverent contrast with the presidents' portraits.

Haberle's career as a *trompe l'oeil* painter spanned only about thirteen years. By 1893 it was reported in the newspaper that he was giving up “close work” because of failing eyesight. In the late 1890s, he abandoned the *trompe l'oeil* mode in favor of impressionistic still lifes of flowers and animals. Haberle, however, remains a leading figure in the American illusionist tradition. Of all his contemporary still-life painters, he took the traditionally objective *trompe l'oeil* form and turned it into a vehicle for his own extroverted and witty personality.

Gertrude Grace Sill
Guest Curator

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Dimensions are in inches, height preceding width.

Paintings

That's Me!, 1882

Oil on panel, 11 x 9½
Private collection

Portrait of His Mother, 1884

Oil on canvas, 24 x 19
Private collection

Reproduction, c. 1886–87

Oil on canvas, 10 x 14
Private collection

Basket of Cherries, 1887

Oil on canvas, 14 x 18
Private collection

Fresh Roasted, 1887

Oil on canvas, 8¾ x 20
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; Gift of the
H. J. Heinz II Charitable and Family Trust

Clay Pipe, c. 1887–90

Oil on canvas, 18 x 8¾
Collection of James Maroney

The Changes of Time, 1888

Oil on canvas, 23¾ x 15¾
Collection of Richard Manoogian

Thermometer, 1888

Oil on canvas, 8 x 4⅞
Collection of Warren Adelson

Can You Break a Five?, c. 1888

Oil on canvas mounted on board, 7⅞ x 11¼
Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth

Japanese Doll, 1889

Oil on canvas, 15⅞ x 6⅝
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Walter H. Rubin

Wife Wine and Song, 1889

Oil on canvas, 30 x 25¼
Private collection

U.S.A., c. 1889

Oil on canvas, 8½ x 12
Collection of Jo Ann and Julian Ganz, Jr.

Time and Eternity, c. 1889–90

Oil on canvas, 14 x 10
The New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut;
Stephen Lawrence Fund

Grandma's Hearthstone, 1890

Oil on canvas, 96 x 66
The Detroit Institute of Arts; Gift of C. W. Churchill in
memory of his father

One Dollar Bill, 1890

Oil on canvas, 8 x 10
Collection of James Maroney

Twenty Dollar Bill, 1890

Oil on canvas, 7½ x 9½
Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts; Gift of
Charles T. and Emilie Shean

The Artist's Palette, c. 1890

Oil on panel with brushes and palette knife, 18 x 27
Private collection

Chinese Firecrackers, c. 1890

Oil on canvas, 21⅞ x 26⅞
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; The Ella Gallup Sumner
and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection

A Favorite, c. 1890

Oil on canvas, 14½ x 11½
Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts; Gift of
Charles T. and Emilie Shean

The Palette, c. 1890

Oil on canvas, 17½ x 24
Private collection

The Slate, c. 1890–95

Oil on canvas, 11 x 8
Private collection; courtesy of James Maroney, Inc.,
New York

Torn in Transit, c. 1890–95

Oil on canvas, 12¾ x 16¾
Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and
a private collection

Torn in Transit (Adams Express Package), c. 1890–95

Oil on canvas, 14 x 12
Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, New
York; Marion Stratton Gould Fund

Night, c. 1891

Oil on canvas, 79 x 52

The New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut;

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Victor Demmer

A Mistaken Tidbit, 1892

Oil on canvas, 12 x 18

Wunderlich and Company, Inc., New York

A Misunderstanding, 1892

Oil on canvas, 10½ x 16

Berry-Hill Galleries, New York

Pan of Fresh Flowers, 1895

Oil on canvas, 20 x 36

Private collection

The Clock, c. 1895

Oil on canvas, 28⅝ x 18 x 3¼

The Newark Museum, New Jersey

Grapes on a Ledge, c. 1895

Oil on canvas, 6 x 15¾

Private collection

The Slate, c. 1895

Oil on canvas, 12 x 9¾

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Henry H. and

Zoe Oliver Sherman Fund

Attributed to John Haberle

Chrysanthemums in a Chinese Vase, c. 1900

Oil on canvas, 27¼ x 28

Collection of Alice Osofsky

Drawings

Haberle's Left Hand (Clenched Fist), 1882

Pencil on paper, 6 x 9½

Jill Newhouse Drawings, New York

Haberle's Left Hand (Holding a Ball), 1882

Pencil on paper, 7 x 9¾

Private collection

New Haven Monuments, 1882

Pencil on paper, 9⅝ x 7¾

The Newark Museum, New Jersey

The Palette, 1882

Pencil and ink on paper, 6 x 9½

Collection of Alice Osofsky

Picture of Easel and Landscape, 1882

Pen and ink on paper, 7⅝ x 9¾

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; The Mabel Brady

Garvan Fund Collection

Trompe L'Oeil with Bird, 1882

Pen and ink with pencil and wash on paper, 6⅝ x 9½

Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and
a private collection

Path through Woods, c. 1882

Crayon on paper, 6⅝ x 9½

Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York

Trees by a Stream, c. 1882

Crayon on paper, 6⅝ x 9⅝

Brandywine River Museum, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and
a private collection

The Yellow Canary, 1883

Watercolor and ink on paper, 8 x 4¹⁵/₁₆

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; Gherardi

Davis Fund

Boy on a Stool, 1884

Crayon on gray paper, 9 x 7⅝

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Magriel

Lady with a Riding Crop, 1884

Pencil on paper, 9½ x 7½

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; The Mabel Brady

Garvan Fund Collection

Classical Heads, c. 1884

Charcoal on paper, 22⅞ x 17½

Collection of R. J. Dawson

Man with Beret and Other Subjects, c. 1884

Charcoal on paper, 23 x 16

Collection of R. J. Dawson

Skull, c. 1885

Crayon on paper, 8¾ x 9½

Private collection

Little Card Player, 1886

Pencil on paper, 9 x 5½

Jill Newhouse Drawings, New York

Little Dutch Girl, 1886

Pencil on paper, 9 x 5½

Jill Newhouse Drawings, New York

Study of a Man (formerly *Self-Portrait*), 1886

Pencil on paper, 8¼ x 5¾

Collection of William J. Steifel

Portrait of a Young Girl in a Straw Hat, 1887

Pencil on paper, 12 x 9½

Jill Newhouse Drawings, New York

Exchange Alley from Hotel Royale, New Orleans, c. 1889

Pencil on paper, 4½ x 7½

Kennedy Galleries, New York

Metairie and Green Wood Cemeteries in New Orleans, c. 1889

Pencil on paper, 4¾ x 7½

Kennedy Galleries, New York

Skull Sketches, c. 1889

Pencil on paper, 7½ x 5¼

The New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut;
Stephen Lawrence Fund

Study for Night, c. 1890

Pencil on paper, 5 x 4

The New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut;
Stephen Lawrence Fund

Catfish Row in Savannah, 1891

Pencil on paper, 4½ x 7½

Kennedy Galleries, New York

French Opera House, 1891

Pencil on paper, 4¼ x 7¼

Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York

From Hotel Room Window, 1891

Pencil on paper, 4¼ x 7¼

Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York

New Orleans Sketches, 1891

Pencil on paper, 4½ x 7½

The New Britain Museum of American Art, Connecticut;
Stephen Lawrence Fund

Mice, c. 1892

Pencil on paper, 11¼ x 4½

Private collection

Studies of Mice and a Cat, c. 1892

Pencil on paper, 10¼ x 4¼

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; The Mabel Brady
Garvan Fund Collection

Toil and Rest, c. 1892

Pencil on paper, 11¼ x 4½

Private collection

Profile of Man with Mustache, 1894

Charcoal on paper, 13¼ x 9⅝

Collection of Susan and Herbert Adler

Man Covering His Eyes, c. 1895

Pencil on paper, 12 x 9⅞

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; The Mabel Brady
Garvan Fund Collection

Lithographs

Bones, 1880

Lithograph, 14½ x 22

Collection of R. J. Dawson

Two Business Cards, c. 1885–89

Lithographs, each 4⅝ x 3⅝

Alfred Frankenstein Papers, Archives of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Whitney Museum of American Art
Fairfield County

One Champion Plaza
Stamford, Connecticut 06921

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